

P 201935Z MAR 09  
FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9769  
INFO HAITI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY  
AMCONSUL QUEBEC PRIORITY  
HOMELAND SECURITY CENTER WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL PRIORITY  
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT AU PRINCE 000318

STATE FOR WHA/EX AND WHA/CAR  
STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CAR  
S/CRS  
INL FOR KEVIN BROWN, DIANNE GRAHAM, AND MEAGAN MCBRIDES/CRS  
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD  
INR/IAA  
WHA/EX PLEASE PASS USOAS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/19/2014

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SUBJECT: LEAKING LIKE A SIEVE: HAITI'S NORTHERN COASTLINE

REF: A. 08 PORT AU PRINCE 001748

[1](#)B. 08 PORT AU PRINCE 001359

[1](#)1. Summary (C) A UN Police technical advisor working in Cap Haitien believes that clandestine boat migration is a highly-organized business and that intercepted passengers almost always try to shield captains and trip organizers from detection and capture by maritime authorities. He also reports that recent spikes in illegal migration are in part due to local fears about possible elections-related violence. The Haitian National Police's (HNP) Coast Guard Division (HCG) is ill-equipped to intercept migrants or narcotics traffickers from key positions along the northern coastline. The Haitian Port Authority (APN) continues efforts to improve security, but meets resistance from local city officials. End Summary.

ORGANIZERS, PASSENGERS, AND POLITICS  
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[1](#)2. (C) Eduardo Da Silva (protect throughout), a Montreal police officer assigned as UNPOL Technical Advisor to the Haitian Coast Guard's Cap Haitien office since September 2008, reports several changes in boat travel patterns and usage along Haiti's northern coastline. Since a substantial uptick in illegal migrations began this January, the HCG has intercepted more families with small children destined for the U.S. They tell officials that they are leaving for three primary reasons: 1) fear of elections violence, 2) the 'Obama factor,' (a perception that the new administration will change immigration policy toward Haiti) and 3) economic misery. (Note: Embassy Miloffs and Poloffs have not previously heard migrants express fear of election violence. End note.) More migrants recently appear destined for Panama, although Da Silva has not determined the reason. Currently, organizers charge fees ranging between 2500 and 4000 Haitian Dollars (330.00 - 526.00 USD).

[1](#)3. (C) The Fanmi Lavalas party does not seem to have a large or well-supported presence in Cap Haitien, states Da Silva, but repatriates fleeing elections violence give him the impression that locally-active party members are well-armed and potentially violent.

[1](#)4. (C) Da Silva has no doubt that illegal boat travel to the U.S. is an organized industry: 'Like every other money-making enterprise here, everyone in town knows who runs that business and has their cell phone number.' He observed that it would cost too much for someone running a migration business to use a boat once just to abandon it after making landfall in the U.S. In fact, he reports, migration

organizers have lookouts stationed outside HCG offices to alert outgoing and returning boats by telephone whenever officers leave the premises and/or go on patrol.

15. (C) After numerous repatriation interviews, Da Silva believes that migrants misrepresent to U.S. officials their names, economic status, motivations, and means of travel. No biometric data is collected from illegal migrants. Repatriates commonly tell Poloffs that they had no assistance buying, stealing, or building a boat, paid no one any fees, their relatives had no idea they were leaving Haiti, and that they were motivated solely by economic factors, or more recently, to flee the misery resulting from 2008's storm season.

16. (C) Organizers also advise passengers to appear as impoverished as possible in the event of interdiction. At repatriation on January 29 in Port-au-Prince, one boat passenger told another Embassy Poloff that organizers instructed them to leave their shoes at home to make themselves appear poor. In Cap Haitien, Da Silva reports that the HCG recently intercepted several naked young men who, after pleading severe poverty, were soon afterward observed retrieving well-pressed clothing from garbage bags filled with personal belongings, replacing watches on their wrists, and purchasing food at nearby vendors' stalls. Not infrequently, the U.S. Coast Guard and HNP later uncover information indicating that relatives in the Haitian Diaspora purchases tickets for illegal migrants via a third party.

16. (C) The Cap Haitien Coast Guard knows the identity of a local organizer responsible for a recently-intercepted vessel carrying more than two hundred passengers. One repatriated individual was told that he would be charged with illegal migration and sent to jail himself if he didn't reveal the organizer's identity. He did, and the Coast Guard has photos of the organizer onboard the vessel as well as other corroborating evidence and plan to arrest the suspect. Arrests of such boat captains are rare. Whether they arrest and prosecute this known person may be a test of the GOH's will to prevent illegal migrations by sea.

#### IMPROVEMENTS AND SHORTFALLS

17. (C) Da Silva reports that Haitian Coast Guard offices are professional and committed to their jobs, but that they lack sufficient equipment to effectively deter illegal immigration or capture drug traffickers along Haiti's northwest coast. An area of special concern is Port-de-Paix, where the HCG cannot venture out even during medium winds because seas becomes too rough for their small patrol vessel, a limitation that Da Silva believes does not apply to well-financed drug runners. He estimates that the Coast Guard patrols this area 'only once every two or three weeks' and that earlier-mentioned lookouts monitor Coast Guard movements in the area. Consequently, he believes, migrants and traffickers have little reason to fear capture by the HNP.

18. (C) In addition to equipment shortfalls, the local Coast Guard must also contend with attempts by city officials to thwart security improvements. Despite National Port Authority (APN) efforts to improve port security (ref A), Da Silva reports that port officials learned during a recent inspection of incoming vessels that crew members had sometimes not been questioned for years and that others carried no identity papers, leaving wide open the possibility of all forms of trafficking. APN Director has begun requesting crew manifests and standardizing entrance requirements, but must contend with public criticism of his efforts by local Lavalas mayor, Michel St. Croix. (Note: APN management, disgruntled former APN employees, and local authorities share a contentious history, sometimes characterized by threats of violence over control of its Lavalas-heavy workforce (ref B). End note).

19. (C) Comment. A well-organized network of illegal migration entrepreneurs stands ready to satisfy any increase

in demand for clandestine boat passage out of Haiti. Organizers ''guarantee'' successful passage - for a fee that many Haitians, especially those with overseas support - can afford. The inability to collect biometric data results in little risk to would-be illegal migrants for concealing their identities, protecting migration organizers, and making repeated attempts at illegal seaborne migration. The HCG does not have the capacity to handle even the current level of illegal migration attempts from the Port-de-Paix coastline. Embassy will continue to collect information from local officials on the business of illegal sea migration, and focus on the equipment needs of the Haitian Coast Guard. NAS and MLO are collaborating on a project to establish an HCG base in Port-de-Paix and NAS is working on a proposal to upgrade the HCG facility and equipment in Cap Haitien, but those efforts will not come to fruition for some time, leaving traffickers with a continuing advantage in the area.

SANDERSON